Chapter 4: Desire (II)

> Desire is appetite with consciousness thereof. . . . in no case do we strive for, wish for, long for, or desire anything, because we deem it to be good, but on the other hand we deem a thing to be good, because we strive for it, wish for it, long for it, or desire it. (Baruch Benedict de Spinoza, 1677, *Ethics, Part III*)

> The term "desire" is understood here in a rather special way. It does not refer to the pursuit and possession of a love object . . . but to the visual figures of the text that elaborate a structure of opposition which expresses not so much the desire for an object as the psychic process of desire itself. (Linda Williams, 1987, *Figures of Desire,* p. xvii)

> I would still encourage somebody, if they wanted to make a movie, to just go take a movie camera. That's clearly been shown to work. (Nicole Holofcener, 2010, "Interview," *The A.V. Club*)

Desire radiates longingly, persistently, and in all directions. To support this claim, consider Spinoza's *Ethics, Part III*, in which he asserts that striving (desire) is a universal property shared by all beings and things. Cinematic desire, too, is ongoing; seeing a film from inception to production to projection to spectation/consumption, and possibly to critique (and *etc.*, *etc.*) requires intensely persistent desire, especially for the academic auteur who is working in affectively intense scenes of uncertain desire and without a clear sense of direction. Cinematic desire is polymorphous, disorientatingly open—consider the affordances of multimodal making and the activation of multiple senses. Yet cinematic desire is also constrained, rhetorically attuned to the structures of feeling attributed to a film through its screenplay, direction, acting, lighting, music, ambient sound, and all of the many attributes that comprise a film's ambient force and meaning. Speaking as a filmmaker, I can say that the will to sustain the force of (a) desire in the process of making a film is daunting, presenting one of the fiercest challenges a filmmaker faces. As an *academic* filmmaker, somewhat obstructed by my own awareness of my audience's expectations regarding how I will handle rhetorical conventions, I can say that the will to sustain desire is simultaneously met with a normative will to tame it. At times, this will to tame desire in filmmaking functions as a powerfully deflating, discouraging force, and at other times this admonishing

angel lifts me up so that I am able to see the better choice(s). I will be arguing for the value of both impulses as intensely affect-laden experiences through which we reanimate existing rhetorical knowledge and revitalize hopes for the emergence of new ways of enacting our creative and rhetorical vision. To briefly describe this validating and vital desire for its rhetorical affordances and learning potential, a brief scene.

INT SAN FRANCISCO HOTEL ROOM (THE DRAKE)—3: A.M.

BONNIE is in the bathroom of the small but stylish room while MIKE sleeps in the bedroom. She is seated on the large, black tiles of the bathroom floor. They have a sheen, and they are cold. We see her Macbook Pro on the floor in front of her. She sits, legs splayed to either side, focusing on the screen's display of her edit and playback frames, eyes flickering between them as she types, considers, deletes, types, considers, and sends a status update to Facebook; she wants her friends and colleagues to know of her struggle. She writes to sustain her desire for scaling back from conventions toward shiny new potentials. She writes to identify this activity as furious 3:00 a.m. desire. She writes to pillow fight with her decision to forego title cards that she, in her fear regarding coherence, now, at 3:00 a.m. has "text-edited" in. The cards mark the three "acts" within her film, which will screen in the morning. She writes to say that she knows. She knows that this old convention will shiny up toward greater coherence for a film that had wanted to be about one quasi famous "stranime-ator" but turned out a case study of three because life, constraints, and etc. . . . She keeps the cards, re-renders, and . . .

> BONNIE
>
> (light sigh of something like resignation)
>
> (a beat)
>
> okay.
>
> . . . closes the case. BONNIE goes back to bed for an unsteady but somewhat more relatively possibly better sleep.
>
> END SCENE.

What seems essential in this scene, and going forward, is that film-composition honors creative and critical vision as advanced by the messy, nondiscursive, fully embodied, affectively responsive, cognitively and rhetorically capable film composer, the film-compositionist. In this chapter, I want to argue that we have good reason to do so. In fact, as I write, I am lit by the glow of Casey Boyle's (2016) "Writing and Rhetoric and/as Posthuman Practice."

Here, Boyle rethinks the nature of our work by moving beyond recent, officially articulated "frameworks" that seek to capture just what it is that we do and teach. Boyle, a digital scholar, pedagogue, and long-time editor of the digital journal *Enculturation: A Journal of Rhetoric, Writing, and Culture*, sustains a disposition to networked, ecological, and posthuman rhetorics, pedagogy, and praxis. Boyle's posthuman practice finds clarity in being and becoming, in emergence, immanence, and in moving beyond retrogressive notions of authors/auteurs, many of which have been complexified within the brief history of the term "auteur" that I sketched earlier, in chapter 2. Without directly referencing affect, Boyle here articulates a version of rhetoric that is attuned to affect, nevertheless:

> [R]hetoric, by attending more closely to practice and its nonconscious and nonreflective activity, reframes itself by considering its operations as exercises within a more expansive body of relations than can be reduced to any individual human. (2016, p. 552)

Boyle is careful to attend to networked being and/as rhetorical practice, but appreciation of this state of affairs need not diminish our attentiveness to particular nodes within our discursive assemblages. So whereas a "body of relations" defines our praxis in ways that are irreducible to "any individual human," (Boyle, 2016, p. 552), we are nonetheless affectively charged agents, and our attunements shape the nature of our various relations in ways that invoke care, study, and critique. Bound, as we are, within convention, we nevertheless follow our affective intensities toward our better articulations. This work that is aided by digital tools that enable us to capture, improvise, script, arrange, consider, critique, revise, and perform our sense of these orchestrations—and, importantly, how they (do or may) shape selves, communities, cultures, and other assemblages, other bodies of relations. Digitally mediated film-composition lights up a vast range of desires (from deeply conventional to radically non-normative) as radically and ongoingly productive. For though our composing efforts are met with a seeming counterforce—a will to tame desire, a force against which a good deal of progressive theory, scholarship, pedagogy, and praxis is in opposition—this force is both a challenging sort of obstacle and an illuminating, contour-defining light of shiny rhetorical wisdom. It seems likely that whatever the outcome, this will is at work in our lives as composers, as our choices are determined through processes of invention that call upon us to move with and against our desire, visions, and discovered purposes. Thus, while cruel auteurism meets desire with what may feel like outrageous demands and stifling constraints, these same desires may also, in the final

cut, reveal themselves as Berlantian zones of optimism for desiring compositional choices that have made possible the effective cinematic object, the winning screening, the longed-for publication and perhaps at least some of the material and certainly the affective rewards that attend it.

The will to tame desire in this chapter is powerfully met with resistance, yet I make the curatorial effort. I want to talk about auteurist (and other forms of) desire and how DIY digital filmmaking moves rhetors to higher (including extra-normative, extra-conventional) enactments of their rhetorical practice. This means that I will write quite a bit about aesthetics and hint at the pleasures we seek through aesthetically curated compositional activity as activity bound up in the very perception of a pleasing aesthetics, and of being itself (see Spinoza, *Ethics III*). Additionally, I will think about student desires, pedagogical desires, and disciplinary desires, as these desires are both bound up in and are themselves binders of certain forms of rhetoric-aesthetic pleasure. That's a lot of binding. More simply, film-composition wants all the pleasures. As *Cruel Auteurism*'s initial chapters make clear, the emergence of our desires for film in composition extends to the early twentieth century and the birth of film as an aesthetic, artistic, creative, and intellectual cultural practice. That is to say, filtered intimations of film as public rhetoric were initiated long before they gathered the kind of momentum we value today in film-composition. However, it was later on the timeline that film gathered overt force as rhetorical agent toward digital scholarship, cultural change, and academic pedagogy. This chapter explores our amplified desires, our sense of potential for,and enactments of vital, digitally mediated rhetorical choices.

Rhetorical Velocity and the Dialectical Automaton

It is difficult to know where to begin, but since we are incepting[45] and because this book is rendered in words, I want to begin with a clever phrase—"rhetorical velocity" (DeVoss & Ridolfo, 2009). "Rhetorical velocity" neatly articulates momentum both as a practice and as a way of characterizing a moment in time. Conceptually capturing the nature of our choices in the present, Danielle Nicole Devoss and Jim Rodolfo articulate what I read as a sense of Deleuzian "movement-image," a way of coalescing images (in the case of their *Kairos* publication, screen grabs following a digitally mediated news story evolving over a three-day period) into a kind of metaphorical meaning, a sense of wholeness about an unfolding narrative. Their important *Kairos* webtext, "Composing for Recomposition: Rhetorical Velocity and Delivery" re-

---

45   see Christopher Nolan; see the timeline that moves in both redirections.

veals that our choices play out in time contingent compositional practices; in other words, rhetorical velocity happens on something very much like a filmic timeline. DeVoss and Ridolfo consider the digitally mediated, revamped rhetorical canon of Delivery through the term "rhetorical velocity," a term that wants to articulate how we write for and enact desired rhetorical effects. They explain rhetorical velocity as

> a strategic approach to composing for rhetorical delivery. It is both a way of considering delivery as a rhetorical mode, aligned with an understanding of how texts work as a component of a strategy. In the inventive thinking of composing, rhetorical velocity is the strategic theorizing for how a text might be recomposed (and why it might be recomposed) by third parties, and how this recomposing may be useful or not to the short or long-term rhetorical objectives of the rhetorician. (DeVoss & Ridolfo, 2009, para. 1)

By thinking "ahead," toward how others might receive and remake a work, rhetors working for rhetorical velocity are attentive to the reception of a work, which is to "think ahead" on a timeline of rhetorical movement and open potential (think composing for counterargument—same as it ever was). We must appreciate the clever choice of incorporating a term denoting the movement of time into their effort to articulate a compositional trend and recognize the rhetorically interventionist nature of film-composition as capable of generating cultural change. Similarly, consider how Deleuze (1985) recalled how Eisenstein's view of chronologically determined emergence—movement-toward-meaning, meaning inclusive of how "the character experiences himself" as well as how "the way in which the author and the viewer judge him," which is convergence—"integrates thought into the image" (as cited in Deleuze, 1985, p. 161). This capacious rhetorical sensibility, this capacity to discern beyond agential rhetoric exclusively and toward a dynamic network of able actants was so impressive as to invoke Eisenstein's discernment of a "new sphere of filmic rhetoric, the possibility of bearing an abstract social judgment," (Deleuze, 1985, p. 161) a kind of cinematic public sphere, the very sort within which DeVoss and Ridolfo find "rhetorical velocity" vibrantly thrumming into being due to the affordances of digital media and the speed with which we share information. Regarding Eisenstein's "filmic rhetoric," and consistently articulating a mechanically correct concept regarding the velocity of key convergences, Deleuze theorized "[a] circuit which includes simultaneously the author, the film, and the viewer" (1985, p. 161), within which a dynamic range of affects and cognitive actions happen, glow, disturb, settle,

brighten, flicker longingly, and despite all sorts of seeming chaos emerges as functionally meaningful. For Deleuze,

> The complete circuit includes the sensory shock [velocity's affects/effects?] which raises us from the images to conscious thought, then the thinking in figures which takes us back to the images and gives us an affective shock again. Making the two coexist, joining the highest degree of consciousness to the deepest level of the unconscious: this is the dialectical automaton. The whole is constantly open [and] . . . forms a knowledge . . . which brings together the image and the concept as two movements each of which goes towards the other (1985, p. 161).

Eisenstein via Deleuze shows that the sorts of dynamic, networked thought regarding the value of dynamic text events such as film are not new to us in the present moment. That we return to the notion of the "dialectical automaton" who is capable of processing affect and meaning dynamically and potentially absent the constraints of clear and certain purpose seems promising for both digital scholarship and pedagogy. Obviously, DeVoss and Ridolfo found kairotic value in meticulously reanimating that desiring zombie. With a zombie reference, I am applauding the propriety of resurrecting a knowledge that seems both self-evident and in need of critique. However we move with our understanding, though, "velocity" is movement. It is being with and being for (Nancy, as cited in Davis, 2010, pp. 4-10). I am essentially applauding the clever capture of this metaphorical happening. Though "rhetorical velocity" provides a rhetorically sophisticated term for analyzing and generating media texts and events, its rhetorical emplotment also functions ekphrastically to illuminate the emergence of film-composition. In other words, DeVoss and Ridolfo use language to articulate their sense that our multimodal choices might vibe with time contingent compositional practices, such as composing on a filmic timeline. This is the confident contemporary view, and it's been some time in the making, driven by our desires to demonstrate how film matters as intellectual, cultural, rhetorical work. Clearly, DeVoss and Ridolfo work toward rhetorical velocity quite optimistically, recognizing a zone of compositional potential rendered visible by seeing, over time, the unfolding rhetorical capture of a narrative event. This view might not have been possible in earlier, more fearful and less forcefully desiring theories that saw image and film as acritically devoted to little more than sales, or to power. With rhetorical velocity, we can read and produce effective texts on any range of affectively engaging and moving matters, and we may do so with a confidence that derives from the

work of Composition scholars who study and circulate the complex nature of media events and their rhetorics in the present. We have not always been so confident in our skills or in our desires.

A History of Promises

A tentative disposition toward film in classrooms began to shift radically in the 1960s and 1970s. Breathtakingly outlining new zones of optimism in Composition, we find during this time in history a progressive movement that valued "the potentials of providing students with increased representational options" (Shipka, 2011, p. 4). Generously offering her uniquely loving take on the potential within Composition today, Jody Shipka (2011) details the emergence of this more vibrant range of compositional options in *Toward A Composition Made Whole*. She lauds this shift even as she worries that the term contemporarily used to denote it—"multimodality"—constrains abilities to imagine a vital range of compositional options that happen beyond digital technologies. Shipka privileges "the fundamentally multimodal aspects of all communicative practice" (2011, p. 13), and her work masterfully articulates the emergence of "multimodality" even as she is careful to extricate her particular concern for moving beyond screens in articulation of the term's fuller meaning and potential. *Cruel Auteurism* has been projecting a sense of multimodality that is primarily (but not exclusively) possible within the context of the screen. However, by theorizing affective intensities that occur in the processes of composing films as aids to teaching and learning, I share Shipka's concern for increasingly "whole" forms of compositional activity and rhetorical work. Shipka's work is thus crucially important to current theories and practices on "making," "makerspaces," new materialisms, installation work, and film-composition.[46] Shipka's work is profoundly important for contemporary theories and practices in film-composition. Her articulation of desire for theories and practices that value "other representational systems and technologies" (2011, p. 11) resonates with the ongoing desires of early film-compositionists, many of whom worked against limitations regarding moving off the page (and toward the screen). Written during a viscerally progressive era that seems to forecast emergent film-composition (and Shipka's "composition made whole"), Peter Dart (1968) wrote in *English Journal* that

> Teachers are encouraged to use films in their classes. Films, they are told, should be used to provide vicarious experiences, to provide focal points for discussion, and to provide comparisons of media and communication. But the film's most effective and profitable use is probably its most ne-

---

46 "Matter and meaning . . . are not separate elements" (Barad, 2003).

glected function: students need to produce their own films.
(p. 96)

Very hopeful proclamations radiated a desire to participate more fully in the complexity, narrative vitality, and rhetorical potential of film. Referenced earlier and due to its powerful presence throughout many efforts to map film in Composition, Richard Williamson (1971) offered a rich and vibrant proclamation when he argued not simply for the inclusion of film for its potential to teach analysis and enliven classrooms with engaging content. Instead, he advocated "The Uses of Filmmaking in English Composition," moving straight to a consideration of production, articulating what had likely been circulating as a kind of shared desire. Yet, perhaps haunted by earlier doubts and sensing that English was still English and that disciplinary identity trumped interdisciplinary potential, the arguments were still somewhat brief and under-developed.

Later, as Cultural Studies inflected theories and practices in Composition, we began to recognize that engaging content served a variety of ideological functions that rendered a host of popular texts available for critical inquiry. From Raymond Williams' (1954, 1961, 1977) "structure of feeling," we began to think more overtly about affective desire as it circulates through networks of rhetorical action, both oppressive and subversive, in the lived experiences of daily life. For Cultural Studies scholar Lawrence Grossberg (1997), desiring or not, perhaps resistant, "the political intellectual ha[d] no choice but to enter into the struggle over affect in order to articulate new ways of caring" (p. 23). He recalls Richard Hoggart's attempt to define cultural studies as a move to explore "what it feels like to be alive" (as quoted in Gregg & Seigworth, 2010, p. 309). Tracking with my own desiring motivations, some of the most exciting scholarship today hopes to think with "what it feels like to be alive" in the digitally mediated present, with all of the affordances for consumption and production that we enjoy, worry, and utilize as tools for generating responsive, critical, and otherwise intense forms of affectively charged rhetorical action. Digital tools enable us to gesture at articulation of affect in the context of this rhetorically strategic work so that we may render possible the critical desire of film-composition: contemplation of these affects as rhetorical and ideological work.

That a good deal of affect theory worries the Deleuzian "plane of immanence" (2001, p. 27) appoints it nicely as a tool for analyzing and composing films and multimodal texts. Reviewing some of our most intense engagements with Deleuzean thinking, Grossberg explains in an interview with Gregg and Seigworth that it is especially in his studies of Deleuze that he finds a conceptual approach to thinking about emergence that gets at the affective intensities we associate with experience and everyday life. At the same time, he finds that some scholarship drawing upon Deleuze proceeds with too carefree an ap-

proach regarding the actual and the virtual. It seems that worries such as these, while vital to intellectual life and integrity, may also have shaped the earlier sense of futility towards the desire to work with film in English classrooms. Perhaps ironically, it is through Deleuzian desire, and, increasingly, through digital text production, lived experience, multimodality, and film-composition that many discover a timeline for actualizing their projects. Attentiveness to our critical projects is essential, yet it seems clear that uptake may vortex differently depending upon the nature of the desire, which is seemingly but not necessarily contradictory—past and present, being and emergence, ontological and empirical all at the same time. In this space of discontinuity or ambiguity, film-composition shivers with desire. But this sparklingly hopeful desire may, some argue, blind us to a potentially vaporous fog in which little actually happens. In particular, Grossberg worries that affect theory as intellectual tool "simply covers too much ground," and he asserts that this simplicity is problematic, especially because "[t]here are too many forms, too many effectivities, too many organizations, too many apparatuses" (1997, p. 314). For Grossberg, this diverse rhetorical terrain means, for affect theory and its studies that, "affect can let you off the hook," that affect "has come to serve, now, too often, as a 'magical' term. So, if something has effects that are, let's say, non-representational then we can just describe it as 'affect'"(1997, p. 315). Grossberg is correct to worry the velocity of today's scholarship on textual dispositions and practices. However, it seems to me that simply by virtue of possessing a capacity to speak to experience in its various forms and through diverse types of rhetorical assemblage (especially those rendered possible due to the speed of digital processing), affect theory does indeed offer us useful frames for critical inquiry, invention, and composition. Reading through affect theory may begin to address Grossberg's worries over apparatuses, assemblages, and the nature of scholarship on affect even as it draws upon the indeterminacy of how affect theory is defined and uptaken. This point seems to drive Patricia T. Clough (2010) as she argues in "The Affective Turn: Political Economy, Biomedia, and Bodies" that a fog of indeterminacy need not be theorized as lacking critical potential but that instead: "Affect and emotion . . . point . . . to the subject's discontinuity with itself, a discontinuity of the subject's conscious experience with the non-intentionality of emotion and affect" (p. 206). More optimistically than others, Clough wants us to see how working through affect favorably addresses our longing to theorize bodily responsivity:

> The turn to affect did propose a substantive shift in that it returned critical theory and cultural criticism to bodily matter, which had been treated in terms of various constructionists under the influence of poststructuralism and deconstruction.

> The turn to affect points instead to a dynamism immanent
> in bodily matter and matter generally—matter's capacity for
> self-organization in being informational—[. . . as] the most
> provocative and enduring contribution of the affective turn.
> (2010, pp. 206-207)

The Biomediated Body

Clough brilliantly bypasses what she calls a troubling "circuit from affect to
emotion, ending up with subjectively felt states of emotion." That is, Clough
moves beyond "a return to the subject as the subject of emotion" (2010, p. 207).
(This is a matter that worried Lynn Worsham, and rightly so, as it focused
perhaps too narrowly on individuals in a critical moment within the Social
Turn. As well, Boyle's contemporary turn to posthumanism as a productive
frame for rhetorical practice seems implicated in Clough's shared concern).
Working cleverly from within a constellation of scholarly works aimed at a
form of rhetoricity, Clough instead develops the concept of "the biomediated
body," and she is guided by scholars who have benefitted from the insights of
Deleuze and Guattari, Spinoza, and Henri Bergson, scholars who see, rather
as Hansen has argued regarding cognition and techno-rhetorical immersion,
affect as a matter of radical inclusion. For Clough, we might take on a view
of "affect as pre-individual bodily forces augmenting or diminishing a body's
capacity to act," and thereby join these laudable affect and rhetoric scholars
in the contemporary moment, those "who critically engage those technolo-
gies that are making it possible to grasp and to manipulate the imperceptible
dynamism of affect" (2010, p. 207). Clough's major contribution here is that
she is able to bypass a notion of affect as frivolously acritical and instead turns
herself to the laudable task of arguing that

> focusing on affect—without following the circuit from affect
> to subjectively felt emotional states—makes clear how the
> turn to affect is a harbinger of and a discursive accompani-
> ment to the forging of a new body . . . the biomediated body.
> (2010, p. 207)

With Clough, media theorist Chris Vitale (2011) speaks to the value of
affect by looking to how it operates within the process of filmmaking. His
claims resonate with my sense of film-composition as a productive space for
enacting creative and critical vision in ways that both emerge from experien-
tially derived rhetorical knowledge, and in terms of potential to move audi-
ences (both particular and general), cultures, and worlds. Vitale frames his
understanding of this potential as "film-art," but I see through my biomediat-

ed body a version of film-composition in the notion of a productive art, a rhetorical art. Vitale's film-art (our film-composition) conceptualizes the roomy affordances of filmmaking's rhetorical potential by considering our motivations to make films, suggesting that, "we make film-affects, and aim to make more powerful film-affects, so as to more powerfully sculpt our relations with our world, to harmonize with its greatest circuits"(2011).

Here, I take Vitale to mean that these "greatest circuits" with which we long to "harmonize" are extra-normative, fluid, dynamic, and in all the ways we might say it, "open." He sees the value in this openness in ways that resonate with Davis' "rhetoricity" as a state of being:

> [f]or the more a film harmonizes with the world, the more it furthers the project of a deep sync with what is. Such a notion of sync would be far beyond adaptation, for it would be a transvidual world-becoming. Film-art is a part of the world envisioning itself, in and through us. The more powerfully we create, the more our film has resonances beyond ourselves, resonances with the deep structure of what is. That is, the more a film resonates with the deep structure of the world, the more it is affected by the world through its creators, and therefore, the more it has the power to affect more than just the filmmaker, but also the world around it. And thus, the filmmakers must be able to be powerfully affected by the world, so as to powerfully affect it in turn. Filmmakers can become lenses themselves, part of the world's own perpetual re-envisioning. (2011)

Vitale's desiring work, "Towards a Cinema of Affects: A Manifesto, Part I—From Film-World to Film-Art" confidently lights up a path that many in Composition long to travel more and more routinely. Our attempts to engage with textuality in ways that move us, our audiences, and our students mark our sense of purpose. Often, we have turned to film in articulating that purpose, as our history of hopes, fears, and desires have hoped to make clear.

Hyperdrives

From today's vantage, particularly from the perspective of Composition scholarship that draws upon the thinking of Deleuze and through Deleuze scholarship, more generally, we are able to explore the affective intensities of film spectatorship, the potentials of embodied spectating and production, and convergent thinking regarding mind and body, the virtual and the actual, past and present, and a dizzying range of reconfigured binaries that want us to open out to creative and experiential potential. Extending this work in ways that

elide the potential to think affect too narrowly, Daniel W. Smith (2007) explains Deleuzean desire by clarifying that this is no base desire; tending to the drives need not be(come) a static affair that reads exclusively through psychoanalytic lenses toward overdetermined meanings, actions, and potential. Instead, Smith argues that, "conscious will *and preconscious interest* are both subsequent to our unconscious drives, and it is at the level of the drives that we have to aim our ethical analysis" (Smith, 2007, p. 69; emphasis mine). In other words, Deleuze complexifies the drives in ways that attend to the non-discurive, the unassimilable, the unruly, the just-out-of-reach that both defines and encompasses desire as a matter of its existence. *Hyperdrives.* This existential desiring resonates with Composition's being, its purpose, and its history for affective and effective ethical and compositional activity. Deleuzean value for conceptualizing film-composition is a matter of rhetoricity, the *being with* and *being for* that attends consciousness and compositional capacities. As with much digital scholarship that has made room for film-composition, for Smith, Deleuze characterizes "modes of existence, with their powers and capacities," through a dynamic rather than static sense of what those modes might entail:

> Deleuze approaches modes of existence, ethically speaking, not in terms of their will, or their conscious decision making power (as in Kant), nor in terms of their interests (as in Marx, for example), but rather in terms of their drives. (2007, p. 69)

Optimistically attentive to drives—both known and unassimilable—in contemplation of ethics, we move more forcefully toward the value of affect theory for rhetorical ethics and film-composition. But how? There is a great deal of ephemeral feeling going on here, and as many may sense, not enough that is clearly articulable for ethics, pedagogy, or scholarship. If anything, though, Composition has a history of attending to visual metaphors and metaphors of complexity (kyburz, 2005) as a portal opening toward optimal conditions for intellectual work. In its capacious interdisciplinarity, our field has reached to find the more productive paths to better rhetorical practices. Film-composition is no different. As I see her complexifying Deleuzean value for thinking generative rhetorical work like filmmaking and multimodal composing, Media Studies scholar Amy Herzog (2000) explains why Deleuze matters for film theory in ways that get after the productive, the dynamic:

> The greatest achievement of the Cinema books is that they suggest a means of looking at film that explodes static views of the work that the work of art does. Rather than "representing" something, film, for Deleuze, has the potential to create its own fluid movements and temporalities. These

movements, while related to formal elements of rhythm and
duration within the film itself, cannot be reduced to specif-
ic techniques or concrete images. Similarly, the temporality
that Deleuze locates within the cinema cannot be pinned to
a specific type of shot, nor a particular moment in the shoot-
ing, editing, projection, or reception of a film. (2000)

Herzog adds her voice to a scholarly vortex that strives, desires, and longs
for being in striving. The emphasis, here, is on movement. Striving as being and
becoming, with options for rhetorical action evolving and clarifying and mov-
ing into and out of range according to the positionality of spectators, with their
own fields of dynamic striving activated and inflecting the meaning-making
process. Further highlighting the value of dynamic Deleuzean desire, Richard
Rushton (2009) rejects the (retro)conventional approach to spectatorship as
passive: "Rather than spectators passively deprived of their bodies and held in
thrall to an ideological apparatus, Deleuze's writings gave rise to the possibility
of spectators who engaged their bodies and senses" (p. 45). Through desire, we
move beyond what Rushton calls Deleuze's "cinematic bodies," portals to "new
cinematic territories beyond the ocularcentric, psychoanalytically focused dis-
courses" (2009, p. 46) that had marked a notion of the passive spectator, a-crit-
ically receiving cinematic texts.[47] Instead, affect, through embodied Deleuzean
desire, affords us a critical approach to film-composition. Speaking for myself
and some of my students, I can testify to the validity of this claim, particular-
ly as it hints at affectively derived intuition as motivational for key rhetorical
choices (more on this in upcoming anecdotes and student commentary).

Our collective desire to look beyond constraining notions of spectatorship
even as we began to proclaim more eagerly a desire to begin production work
in film-composition marks a good deal of scholarship in this period. For ex-
ample, witnessing the emergence of new forms of textual play, Sarah J. Arroyo
(2013) examines a series of diachronically networked theories on the nature of
compositional spaces and interfaces. She characterizes the productive inven-
tional space of "chora" as "a threshold or conduit of pure exposure along which
bodies, through relations of touching, experience the emergence of otherwise
unknown capacities and the shaping of new assemblages" (2013, p. 68). This is
the "agonizing" abyss, for Diane Davis, in which we confront our "unanswered
desire to hit bottom so that one might start building one's way back up and out"
(2013, p. 76). Arroyo reads this abyss as a space of potential, referring to it via
Deleuze and Guattari (1987) as a "fog," or "glare" (2013, pp. 262-263). For Ar-

---

47   The older notion finding purchase in early film-composition scholarship, where profes-
sors worried student reception of filmic content, where they worried film's potential to shape
morality over and above Literature's.

royo, given her attentiveness to Ulmerian "electracy" as a frame for exploring contemporary video assemblages, this fog is a space of invention, of networked sociality and compositional being: "there is no way out, yet there is no trap." She explains that, "[t]he abyss is where we reside; it is not a place on which to stand or out of which to emerge, but the chora, the 'hole' that cannot be separated from life itself" (2013, p. 68). Concerned for the potential emergence of "multiple possibilities for invention and production" (2013, p. 69), Arroyo sees the fog, the abyss, and the glare as descriptive characterizations of chora, the interface that calls upon our highest rhetorical capacities even as it registers our fuller, often messier and less desirably projected characteristics. This reality is what Arroyo refers to as "electrate reasoning: the logic of the 'and'" (2013, p. 69), and it involves a great deal of theoretical contemplation within processes of invention, movement, and making. In other words, electorate reasoning, which guides a great deal of (digital) film-composition work, involves improvisational being within spaces of networked sociality, and in these spaces, film-composition insists along with decades of Composition theory, we can become even better makers, better rhetors and rhetoricians. Nevertheless, it feels important to further reveal some of the problematic notions associated with this better rhetor, newly emboldened through film-composition and the affordances of digital media, and re-animated by affective desire. It's no secret to Composition, even less surprising to film-composition, that affective desire is essential to rhetorical work that circulates toward any sort of moving signification. I want to suggest the rhetorically powerful nature of (making) affectively moving films (to note what may seem quite obvious, that they function as cultural politics). Because of film's powerful rhetorical potential, this work as scholarship and pedagogy has been viewed with fear, suspicion, and cautious reservation. Yet, desire persists. And, in the context of digital scholarship and thinking through the powerful notion of mattering, posthuman rhetorics, and rhetorical velocity, these fears may call for our attention but they are unlikely to diminish our desire. For, if we are persistently operating as dialectical automatons, radiating desires in ways that we tend to but cannot contain, what of our excess? What of our intensity?

In and Out of Formation

Worrying the "excess," Ben Anderson (2010) examines the value of thinking through affect as "an imperative that emerges from a nascent recognition that affect is modulated and transmitted in forms of power addressed to life" (Hardt & Negri, 2004; Thrift, 2005) (as quoted in Anderson, 2010, pp. 161, 162). Anderson cites Deleuzian (1992) efforts to map "the imbrication of different affects in power formations that modulate the circulation and dis-

tribution of affects" by disrupting "the prescriptive normalizations of forms of disciplinary power," and he lauds how this transformative notion of affect moves toward a glimmer of the agential:

> Here it is precisely the transmission of affect, its movements, disruptions, and resonances, that forms of vital or life power can come to harness. These forms of power do not prevent and prescribe but work in conjunction with the force of affect, intensifying, multiplying, and maturing the material-affective processes through which bodies come in and out of formation (Anderson, B., 2010, p. 162)

Anderson writes out of a concern for how affect has been taken up in cultural theory, and in many ways his concern seems to resonate with fearful discourses about the affective power of film in Composition—the worries of frivolity, ostensibly acritical rhetorics of play, and potential for exploitation of ways of being that slip between the normative and other. In short, Anderson worries hopeful claims that are made regarding affective "excess," and these are claims that seem central to a good deal of digital scholarship, particularly works that value imagistic rhetorical practice for its moving potential. Articulating these worries as a set of polar oppositions, Anderson explains that,

> claims to the unassimilable excess of affect over systems of signification or narrativization provide the ontological foundation for the promise of a new way to attend to the social or cultural in perpetual and unruly movement, whether codified in terms of the "autonomy" of affect (Massumi, 2002) or the "immeasurability" of affect (Hardt and Negri, 2004). (Anderson, B., 2010, p. 162)

The rhetorician will see the dilemma for film-composition. We glimpse a sense of potential, aporia for new ways of composing and being through our indeterminate efforts at making beyond normative signification, yet how are we to imagine ourselves beyond? How are we to imagine excess? These questions are troubled as Anderson explains the opposition to the notion of a promising affective excess:

> The transitive excess of affect is precisely what is targeted, intensified, and modulated in new forms of power—forms of power that themselves function through an excess of mechanisms that saturate and invest life, whether named as "control societies" (Deleuze 1992), or "biopower" (Hardt and Negri, 2000). (Anderson, 2010, p. 162)

Anderson's troubling binary—claims for the excessive, autonomous, and immeasurable intensities of affect vs. affect as fertile ground for emergent forms of power—points in the direction of desires for filmmaking and of film-composition. Unable to clearly untrouble this binary, film-compositionists work from within it, ever driven by their desires to address a central question Anderson worries in his work, "[h]ow to attend to, welcome, and care for indeterminacy, for affect's virtuality?" (Anderson, B., 2010, p. 162). Speaking to a shared concern for the evolution of film-composition but more realistically claiming for myself a compositional desire, I find value in Anderson's effort to encourage us to wonder, to ask if we are capable of conceptualizing "the imbrication of affect in an excess of knowledges, procedures, and techniques without being enamored of a power that acts without limit or outside?" (Anderson, B., 2010, p. 162). I see here a desire that runs throughout the affects associated with discourses on film in Composition. We want to use and make films that move us and our audiences, potentially as a rhetorico-cultural politics of intervention. Yet at the same time, we recognize what is at stake in claiming affective excess as a tool for forecasting the value of such work as it exists in contradistinction to centuries of agential rhetoric that is formed in and delivered through words (or even through very obvious non-fictional rhetorical cinematic forms, like PSAs—Public Service Announcements, with their obvious rhetorical stakes and normative values, and documentaries). With Anderson, I want to claim that we must "care for affect's virtuality"; we must care for affective excess because "the ontological foundation for the promise of a new way to attend to the social or cultural in perpetual and unruly movement" is too rich to ignore (Anderson, B., 2010, p. 162). That is to say, despite the potentially troubling unruliness of affective excess, the history of its becoming includes

> intellectualist discourses about affect and its ability to escape, shatter, and seduce reason. It may also evoke a still too present equation between emotion and the gendered figure of the irrational woman or the classed figure of the angry crowd. Equating affect with excess is risky, even if it is far from new (albeit increasingly common) as a refrain across many contemporary affect theories. Hence, claims of excess have also been central to the disavowal of affect theory. Despite this troubled genealogy, addressing the equation between affect and excess is necessary because it opens up a question for a politics of affect: how to think the intricate imbrication of the unassimilable excess of affect and modalities of power that invest affect through an excess of techniques? (Anderson, B, 2010, p. 163)

In many ways, film-composition wants to create a space for affective excess as a politics of affect, a politics of affect that werqs on a timeline rendered possible via the affordances of digital media, attunement to affective intensity, rhetorical knowledge and skill, and a Composition gracious enough to recognize the value of all of its embodied agents and the bodies of relations they inhabit, the assemblages they generate, and the communities they seek to move into and out of formation, always toward better versions of being with and being for. I am not alone in working with a sense of the value of the excess. I am certain of my own affective intensities and of their situatedness within an image-dense screen culture. Thus, I return to my compositional encounters with the notion of image pleasure as a way of advancing and promoting a vital motivational desire.

Desiring → Happiness

Toward this pleasant potential, Thomas Rickert kairotically offered his 2007 *Acts of Enjoyment.* Any discussion of this work seems to belong in the Pleasure chapter, but desire and pleasure are intimate, and we are approaching pleasure via desire that must be seen as its generous partner. Working to sustain both, Rickert worries aspects of a generalized suspicion regarding affective intensity and intellectual pleasure. Rickert rejects this resistance to a view of pleasurable affects as somehow acritical, explaining more broadly that "the negativity inherent in establishing critique as the ultimate sign of a student-citizen-rhetor remains problematic, if not actively detrimental" (2007, p. 202). Rickert encourages us to wonder why we might "give way" to our desire, rejecting a historical suspicion of pleasure (in the name of the postmodern subject and "The Turns"). He lights up a zone of optimism by thinking beyond this history to see that we may "navigate by a few rather nebulous although quite useful coordinates" as a way of introducing Žižek, on pleasure. Žižek is helpful in articulating the powerful nature of filmmaking as critical rhetorical work because of his emphasis on the "backwards glance" that fantasy demands. As Rickert explains

> Žižek argues that while we may never attain "it," the sublime
> object granting us full satisfaction (primordial jouissance),
> we are nevertheless structured via the "backwards glance" of
> fantasy that suggests it is still attainable. (2007, p. 203)

This retroactive, reflective fantasy glance seems to comport nicely with a view of the sorts of work filmmaking affords us. For documentary filmmaking, the point seems obvious; we have tons of footage, and in the reviewing, sorting, and editing process, we discover "it," the pleasures of critical mak-

ing, critical and creative—rhetorical—vision. But even in the case of fictional narrative filmmaking, we are bound by time; we recognize that shooting on a set generates a range of powerful affects that may or may not be associated with what is revealed through editing. The range of sights, sounds, decisions, distractions, hungers, desires, and pleasures we find on film sets make the acquisition of this critical vision a matter of jouissance, an embodied pleasure associated with the replay(ing). As I've been arguing, critical play is important to film-composition. And for so much pleasure, we exert a great deal of energy glancing backwards to ensure the validity of and hope for our fantasies; it's a good thing that the stuff of our community ties exists in this scholarly activity. We want this. Our desire sustains, all the more so if it's enacted in the context of filmmaking and digital scholarship and pedagogy, where we find clusters of promises rangy enough to move us beyond the normative script and toward new forms of collective rhetorical action.

Happy Things

Sometimes, we see our way to a promise because of a thing. We develop desires and attachments, and we have often, in the academy, explored these attachments in terms of their deleterious affects. However, affect theorist Sara Ahmed articulates what I see as a zone of optimism by getting us to consider "Happy Objects" in her 2010 article of the same name. I see her argument as sharing vibratory space with many others in this book, works all attuned to one another via shared investments in rhetoricity (thus, all implicated as forms of rhetorical work that is dynamically and affectively about *being with* and *being for*). Through Ahmed, we might consider the "happy" nature of immersive experiences in filmmaking. Again, this might seem to belong to the Pleasure chapter, but Ahmed moves me to validate my desire in ways that keep her here, in Desire, moving toward happiness, flailing longingly toward pleasure.

Moving beyond any attempt to define affect as a particular thing that is or is not, may or may not compel us toward greater critical acuity, Ahmed instead sees affect as a valuable way to frame "the messiness of the experiential, the unfolding of bodies into worlds, and the drama of contingency, how we are touched by what we are near" (2010, p. 30). Ahmed's project is to identify and work toward happiness as a way of theorizing and working through contingency. She notes that happiness is historically defined in relation to a contingency that has far less to do with modern "faking 'til making." Ahmed works through the latter with Mihály Csikszentmihályi, who exemplifies this contemporary and widespread belief by proclaiming that

happiness is not something that happens. It is not the result
of good fortune or random choice; it is not something that
money can buy or power command. It does not depend on
outside events, but, rather, on how we interpret them. Hap-
piness, in fact is a condition that must be prepared for, cul-
tivated and defended privately by each person. (as quoted in
Ahmed, 2010, pp. 30-31)

Like the kinds of hopeful self-help discourses widely ciruclating via au-
thors like Deepka Chopra, Charlotte Kasl, and Anthony Robbins, Csikzsent-
mihalyi here suggests a preference for the agential. Happiness is not some-
thing you are but something you decide that you are. For Ahmed, however,
this version of happiness "could be read as a defense against its contingency,"
which seems sensible in the context of thinking about creative making. I read
Ahmed as articulating a valuing of rhetoricity and all that it entails—being,
circumstance, desire, will, and happenings. That is, I see happiness via Ahmed
as a happening, as a form of being. We render it happy, linguistically, as a
"backwards glance," perhaps, but Ahmed insists that whatever the case, "[h]
appiness remains about the contingency of what happens." She explains,

It is useful to note that the etymology of "happiness" relates
precisely to the question of contingency: it is from the Mid-
dle English "hap," suggesting chance. The original meaning
of happiness preserves the potential of this "hap" to be good
or bad. The hap of happiness then gets translated into some-
thing good. Happiness relates to the idea of being lucky, or
favored by fortune, or being fortunate. (2010, p. 30).

Ahmed's valuing of happiness as relative to contingency forges a zone of
optimism whereby we might see improvisation and/as invention as sources of
compositional pleasure that we experience as filmmakers. It's not so much in
what I force myself to think about what I have made, though Ahmed says that
"to be affected by a thing is to evaluate that thing. Evaluations are expressed in
how bodies turn toward things" (2010, p. 31). Okay, so while I may not be able
to escape the evaluative gestures, it's about the being. I want to assert that hap-
piness, pleasure in filmmaking is about how I/we experience the making—I
want to assert the vital nature of this desire to see the event in the happening,
and in this desire we may be both moved toward situations of enhanced plea-
sure *and perhaps we make better things*. As an emergent area within Compo-
sition already invested in a variety of compositional possibilities and increas-
ingly interested in new materialities, I read with longing Ahmed's notion that
"[h]appiness . . . puts us into intimate contact with things" (2010, p. 31). Here,

I see a flickering desire for film-composition to evolve its ecology in tangible, material ways, in ways that align with the critical value of maker and hacker-spaces, . . . toward the long-desired affordances of crews . . . studios (!). People and places, . . . actual networks emerging from and perhaps folding into and out of the virtual. Ahmed's attunement to attachments as potentially happy even in a state of contingency (the liminal norm, the interstitial) inspires me to continue in this desire. Film-composition exists in this state of happy longing. It's all so dreamy. More particularly, I'm thinking about the cognitive value of affectively pleasurable tactile experience; filmmaking affords a great deal of this sort of experience. Feminist filmmaker and early YouTube pedagogue, Alexandra Juhasz (2016), recently commenting on the importance of feminist filmmaking and attempting to encourage those who desire it, notes, "ideas about film change when your hand hits a camera and vice versa" (2016).

When Your Hand Hits a Camera

Back to One. To aesthetics. I return to Massumi. A brief scan of digital scholarship drawing upon Massumi's work, and in particular his attribution of "the primacy of the affective in image reception" (2002, p. 24) reveals that a great deal of digital and multimodal scholarship and pedagogy is inspired by this claim regarding both the attraction of images and how they render affective intensities in viewers and producers. The line of reasoning goes like this: If our audiences enjoy what they are seeing, if they are affectively moved, they are likely to want to engage in more intensely critical acts of speculation and production. This is the contemporary version of "write about what you know," but with the added BONUS TOY tag line, "write about what you like." I am not here to deride this strategy, and I hope I have sufficiently complexified the seemingly easy perfection of affect as relevant almost exclusively to subjective experience. That is, I hope that my work through Clough's "biomediated body," Davis' "rhetoricity," and other works attentive to seeing affect beyond individual subjective experience has been helpful in getting us to a notion of pleasure that is shared, immersive, encompassing, and constitutive of being for and being with. These works have helped situate my own desire to invest almost completely in a hedonistic experience of rhetoricity as a digital filmmaker, and this has meant that I have (I hope) become a better rhetor (analytics reveal that my digital scholarship is viewed by thousands more than those viewing my print scholarship). "Hedonisitc" is fun, but of course what I am hoping to attend to is *intensity*. I want to think about the ambient meanings circulating with Massumi's claim for affective intensity in image work, the notion that there exists some ephemeral, extra-rhetorical dimension of something like pre-cognitive experience, that it happens

in and through the body, and that this affective intensity creates a space for potential inquiry and rhetorical power. I'm pretty much all about this, and I say it in full recognition of the kooky sound of it. In addition to the works that have hoped to clarify hedonism toward a more critical "appropriate" (scare quotes intentional) notion of pleasure, I will think with David Lynch, here, and simply reproduce his response to inquiries regarding the enigmatic boxed blue key featured in his film, *Mulholland Drive*. The key, so elusively meaning-full in the narrative, never quite materializes a clear attachment, and we are left to wonder. One might imagine that Lynch crafted with a central signifying impulse regarding the blue key. In his book *Catching the Big Fish: Meditation, Consciousness, and Creativity*, he says in a one-sentence chapter, entitled, "The Box and the Key," "I don't have a clue what those are" (2007, p. 115). Keenly true in unfamiliar rhetorical scenes is the shamanistic advice of the sort Lynch offers. We might learn a great deal about our rhetorical desires and our abilities to render them by avoiding efforts toward clarity of intention and control.

Vortexing with and against control is desire. Film-composition invests in broad rhetorical knowledge and skill while vibing insistently with what Kevin DeLuca and Joe Wilferth identify as the rhetorical nature of the "image-event." The image-event captures a sense of the dynamic nature of image work and film-composition. It encourages a vital capacity and a sensitivity to trust in the kinds of affect-laden rhetorical dispositions that compel—beyond convention and easy rationality—engaging forms of compositional activity. Film-composition supports and promotes desires to make films as even as it avoids a "will to tame images," a practice that "rarely captures rhetorical force" (Deluca & Wilferth, 2009, para 11).

In my auteurist efforts to capture rhetorical force, I have often turned to Massumi (2002) for his claims regarding "the primacy of the affective in image reception." However, aware of disputes regarding what many read as his intimation of a free-flowing affect that is somewhat outside signification, outside rhetoric, I have struggled because of the seductive notion of agency inherent in the concept of the unassimilable, the ephemeral corporeal infoldings of experience. I want to believe. Writing the book, I need to open it up. Open what up? The missing ½ second. It's been inspiring. It's been controversial. It's been used to discredit affect theory/studies as frivolous. So you know it, but to review, In "The Autonomy of Affect," Massumi cites a research project in which 9 year old children were shown three versions of a scene featuring a melting snowman—one without words, one with factual narration, and one with narration that articulated the plausible emotional tenor of the moment as the scene unfolded. The children were instructed to rate the films on a "happy–sad" and a "pleasant–unpleasant" scale. The children preferred the

"sad" version; Massumi explains, "the sadder, the better" (2002, p. 24). In addition to the ratings, the children were also physiologically wired to monitor autonomic reactions at the level of heartrate, breathing, and, importantly, galvanic response monitors captured the rate of reaction at the level of the skin (2002, p. 24). It was the original, nonverbal snowman film that generated the strongest reaction from the children's skin. The researchers were confused by the children's "sad" rating as being most "pleasant," but Massumi saw in this that affectively intense image reception could be so intense as to be "overfull" to the point of evading clear articulation or "taming." The wordless version invited suspenseful anticipation that worked in opposition the factual version, because as Massumi explains, "The factual version of the snowman story was dampening. Matter-of-factness dampens intensity. . . . This interfered with the images' effect. The emotional version" caught up rather than interfered with the resonating level of intensity experienced by the viewers. Massumi summarizes: "An emotional qualification breaks narrative continuity for a moment to register a state—actually to re-register an already felt state, for the skin is faster than the word" (2002, p. 25). He goes on to cite another experiment involving skin and brain responses. Patients wearing corticol electrodes received pulses to the electrodes and also to the skin. As Massumi explains, "If the corticol electrode was fired a half second before the skin was stimulated, patients reported feeling the skin pulse first." Analyzing the researcher's findings, Massumi explains that

> Brain and skin form a resonating vessel. Stimulation turns inward, is folded into the body, except that there is no inside for it to be in, because the body is radically open, absorbing impulses quicker than they can be perceived, because the entire vibratory event is unconscious, out of mind. Its anomaly is smoothed over retrospectively to fit conscious requirements of continuity and linear causality. (2002, p. 20)

Massumi's claim of the missing half second as meaning-making activity beyond rhetoric, has been problematic. Yet, he does offer the productive theory of the ½ second not as empty, which being outside of rhetoric can only mean to language scholars, but "overfull," which works quite well for affect theorists. "Overfull" here means the ½ second of autonomic intense skin response is "in excess" . . . it is intense, whereas "will and consciousness are subtractive. They are limitative, derived functions that reduce a complexity too rich to be functionally expressed" (Massumi, 2002, p. 29).

Rhetoric scholars with whom I have explored the giddy potential of a ½ second of intensely felt, language free experience have proved skeptical. And they are not alone. Like a rhetorician's claim that nothing exists outside of

rhetoric, Mark B. Hansen (2015) inquires of the missing ½ second by referencing a variety of media theorists devoted to network theories that grant agency only to the environmental, suggesting a nearly non-human theory of agency. But for Hansen's phenomenological approach, (studies on consciousness and the objects of experience), a

> radically environmental and ontologically neutral account of experience can enhance human experience precisely by throwing into question many of our received notions about the human—including the privilege of (agential) perception over (environmental) sensibility. (2015, p. 15)

So the very conflict over experience outside of rhetoric is at least worth pursuing and decidedly valuable for complicating notions of agency, meaning, and potential (all things that digital teachers and scholars worry toward the goal of creating intensely moving—thus engaging—pedagogies). For Hansen, to ask "what is at issue when an event is thought" is not to dismiss of the human as a kind of "theoretical revolution" but it is instead to study "a shift of emphasis" (2015, p. 29). Just as historical research predicts and reveals. Many early film-compositionists worked in the "language is subtractive" mode—toward the capturation, toward the simple will and ability to bring films into comp classrooms for exploration—through analysis, which often rendered through familiar literary terms and morality lessons. However, today's film-compositionists are confident about the project of revitalizing film in Composition through processes of immersion and nonlinear experimentation.

Aligned with the desires of contemporary film-composition, I am shooting for rhetorical force. *Cruel Auteurism* wants to materialize as a nonlinear cinematic timeline. Motivated by hope, tinged with fear, and shot through with desire, like so many early and contemporary film-compositionists, this may mean "less-than-ordinarily scripted." The timeline wants to move us, to evade a taming. Massumi: "Will and consciousness [aka language] is subtractive" (2002, p. 10). Hansen: We can't perceive free flowing affective intensity but from within technological apparatus designed to perceive it (2015, p. 232). I can't resolve the philosophical conflict over the missing ½ second between "effect and content," but I'm certain of the intensity. And because, as Hansen argues, I am only able to perceive that gap from within the technological machine, I've created a version of the infamous melting snowman film Massumi cited to support the popular claim attributed to him, "The primacy of the affective in image reception" (2002, p. 24). Those critical of the idea of affect as a rigorous frame for rhetorical agency and innovative ways of being and composing have had me doubting. Yet, from within these frames . . . I am vaguely

at home . . . [watch the film[48] that screened with this presentation, a film[49] that was later screened at CCCC 2016]. My experiences in the classroom reveal that students enjoy this space of ambiguous compositional pleasure, as well.

Where I am not quite so comfy is in the conversation about desires for correctness and ethical clarity when it comes to open access images, video, and audio, and their uses in digital scholarship and pedagogical stagings. Here, too, Berlant's (2011) cruel optimism is operational. So too are zones of optimism. I have been the grateful recipient of a good deal of feedback during conference presentations on the matter of DIY digital filmmaking. Prior to any discussion of the content of any of my films, I am routinely asked about Fair Use, first, and "How can I do that?", second. Both questions may be read through the lens of cruel auteurism, and both shimmer brightly within critical, intellectual, and pedagogical zones of optimism.

At the 2014 Conference on College Composition and Communication, I gave a talk on Fair Use as a "bad object" that enables what I called "Open Aesthetics." "Open Aesthetics" sounds good, right? So why refer to its central support system as "bad"? Because some works emerging from liberal Fair Use(s) operate as disruptive, creative, rhetorical works that may or may not register with academic audiences in ways that render conventionally "good life" outcomes (tenure, promotion, etc.). Yet, I continue to rely fairly radically upon Fair Use to make the arguments I want and need to make, and I encourage colleagues, students, and friends to do the same. I believe that many of you are with me. But there is that pesky sense that maybe the constraints aren't clear (enough) and that perhaps we are (I am) "getting away with" something, some form of creativity that I'm compelled to pursue by a desire that seems to promise some other forms of "good life" that may be within my reach. This desire to constrain our work has in many ways created career-length projects, and so it is at work in the construction of some "good lives." I didn't want to go there. I have always wanted to make beautifully thoughtful films that emerge from my lived experience as a creative, observant, immersed, and critical rhetorician freely moving within two ecologies, academia, and film. Consonant with the notion of Edbauer's "mattering texts," I have tried to go there, to make these happen. In doing so, I rely upon reports from sources like the Center for Social Media, reports indicating that not only is Fair Use fair and flexible but that we aren't pushing with nearly enough passion and force. We must move more boldly in the direction of our rhetorico-aesthetic moods, confident in our ability to articulate the nature of our "rewards" and the status of our work as "transformative." Yet, up against the forces of fear (regarding copyright and correctness), and power (market, industry, and disciplinary

48   Visit https://vimeo.com/285368334. Password = snowpeople
49   Visit https://vimeo.com/208253147. Password = onemoretime

voices of "what's right"), our liberally fair uses may function as vibratorily promising forms of Berlant's "cruel optimism," which, as you'll recall, exist "when something you desire is actually an obstacle to your flourishing" (2011, p. 1). My sense of this potential meaning for Fair Use comes from my emic's perspective of academic rewards. In other words, if the work that gains "conventional" rewards (publication, jobs, grants, tenure, promotion) is the work that matters, and if that work is disproportionately about convention, correctness and surveillance, over and above disruptive critical attunements derived from creative indwelling, can we say that our optimistic attachments deny us fuller and more gratifying forms of transformative success? Yes, (a beat) and also, no. Berlant explains

> the magnetic attraction to cruel optimism [by noting that] Any object of optimism promises to guarantee the endurance of something, the survival of something, the flourishing of something, and above all, the protection of the desire that made this object or scene powerful enough to have magnetized an attachment to it. (2011, p. 48)

Here, I can't help thinking of the something we both seek and passionately want to protect as the good life of the conventional tenured academic, for whom a sense of certainty about the foundations of her academic identity is precious, its survival to be ensured. "The good life" means support, academic freedom, . . . it advances critical play, and in many ways it creates sites of inquiry and critique that afford us opportunities to engage with cultural texts in ways that may sustain these very freedoms. However, our ideas about Fair Use are bound up within theories on composing in ways that create confusion about just what we are constraining with our pedagogical inclination to "teach against plagiarism" or otherwise limit our own creative potential by imagining that we dare not use certain media files (or portions thereof)— these moves function as sustaining rhetorics of another kind of "good life," the life of the ethical rhetor who plays fair and by the rules. But these rules exist in many ways to create a kind of threshold ["aka learning"] experience. Shouldn't they be flexible? Speaking for myself, I have been frustrated in my digital filmmaking career by discourses of fear regarding Fair Use. But I use it, push it radically and informed in many ways by my lived experiences in the Sundance Film Festival community, where it's understood that certain rights are acquired in-process, as a filmmaker workshops a scene or the use of a certain audio track, video clip, or still. Unless there is much at stake in the way of financial gain, there is a great deal of freedom in the context of festival screenings, which I liken to sites like the classroom, and the university conference, where we work it out—the creative, critical, rhetorical affordances of the use

our primary concern. In fact, I have become so enamored of these threshold experiences, of live performance, live screenings, sharing and receiving feedback on my creative and critical works that my book project on the matter has languished in the dressing room while my film productions shimmer in the making and the afterglow.

I am theorizing Fair Use in the context of multimodal text production in the modern but still fairly constrained university as a "bad object" sufficient to generate cruel optimism. But it's more . . . and it's the overspill here that's interesting. It's about the visceral experiences of digital filmmaking—especially when the work can play freely with a wide variety of licensed cultural texts that have both shaped the desire to use them *and* perhaps brought to consciousness the very critiques a rhetor's creative work hopes to project. Berlant's potentially soul-crushing theory offers room for optimism. On the "bad object" and the attachment to it, Berlant says

> the hope is that what misses the mark and disappoints won't much threaten anything in the ongoing reproduction of life, but will allow zones of optimism a kind of compromised endurance . . . that will allow the flirtation with some good-life sweetness to continue. (2011, p. 48)

Many of my colleagues are devoted to this sort of flirtation, especially as digital media enable us to enact our creative and transformative rhetorical work and to share it in a thrilling array of performance spaces. We are thus more able than ever "to pay attention to the built and affective infrastructure of the ordinary" (Berlant, 2011, p. 49) that shapes our ambient rhetorics in the Fair present.

In another way of thinking about this hopeful flirtation, I'm thinking about DIY digital filmmaking and the conflict of the auteur vs. the constructivist perspective and citation networking that makes our creative and rhetorical works matter (via publication and circulation). Does creative work that surrounds itself more with the cultural texts that generate affective intensities for the "auteur" and less with a series of citations limit itself in ways that invite a kind of contemporary "failure"? Does the production of filmic texts for rhetorical purposes and the affective intensities of composing and screening stand in the way of more static and conventional forms of academic success? If we continue to worry The Academic Essay or The Book as the compositional object that moves us into scenes of successful living, maybe. However, if we are talking about digital filmmaking that inquires into what Malcolm McCullough (2013) worries as the age of embodied information, maybe not so much. Many of the short films-as-scholarship I enjoy—Arroyo, Lestón, and Carter's (2011) "Chora of the Twin Towers," and Arroyo and Alaei's (2013) intensely moving

remix work, starting with "The Dancing Floor" and including everything they make together, and Lestón's (2013) delightful, contemplative object-oriented piece "Table Without Organs," and even my own *screencube* (2013). For McCullough (2013), these sorts of works compel "inquiry into attention and an environmental history of information" that is "interest[ed] in apertures" and constructed spaces—rhetorics of The Screen over The Frame, because screens ". . . in the form of shutters or blinds can be quietly gratifying to configure on demand" (p. 154). Many of the creative and critical rhetorical films we're producing enact intense desires for interaction with networks and portals that demand critical attention. For McCullough, such "facades, [which both invite, and potentially transport] fill[s] a view, enduringly, often inescapably, in embodied space" (2013, p. 154). And any more, gallery, installation work, 3D projection, virtual and augmented realities further manifest this fullness. I'm hinting at interfaces. Borrowing from Alexander Galloway (2012):

> This book ~~talk~~ is about windows, screens, keyboards, kiosks, channels, sockets, and holes—or rather, about none of these things in particular and all of them simultaneously. For this is a book talk about thresholds, those mysterious zones of interaction that mediate between different realities.[50] (p. vii)

I've been living a threshold experience, seeing that film work wants more from me than this book. Film work wants more from us than the production of academic essays, and books-toward-success, and even webtexts. So despite feeling grateful for the ability to enact my vision in two distinct ecologies, I worry the cruel optimism of digital filmmaking as scholarship. However, I embrace the "good life sweetness" of what I'm calling "cruel auteurism."

In her own attempt to compress the heliotropic[51] dynamics of "cruel optimism," Berlant explains that this state of affairs is responsive and generative, that it is

> about living within crisis, and about the destruction of our collective genres of what a "life" is; it is about dramas of adjustment to the pressures that wear people out in the everyday and the longue durée; it is about the blow of discovering that the world can no longer sustain one's organizing fantasies of the good life. (Published Interview, 2012)

---

50   For the purpose and mode of the presentation, this passage was delivered as follows: "This ~~book~~ talk is about windows, screens, keyboards, kiosks, channels, sockets, and holes—or rather, about none of these things in particular and all of them simultaneously. For this is a book talk about thresholds, those mysterious zones of interaction that mediate between different realities" (p. vii).

51   For more on heliotropic rhetorics, see Mucklebuer, John.

In my own attempt to describe my life's work of the past 11 years, here I am, currently in the process of working toward completion of my first single-authored manuscript. Lamentable? Sure—I got my doctorate *way back in* 1998. Life choices, challenges . . . obstacles amounted to a timeline of six full years for publishing even one article based upon my dissertation, by which time, I was done with its subject, (chaos theory) though chaos continues to provide an appropriate metaphor for my life as a scholar, writer, teacher, composer, and filmmaker. In my book, which my editor recently suggested I re-title "A Beautiful Vision" <blush> but which I continue to refer to as, *Cruel Auteurism* [a bunch stuff post-colon], I argue that writing, composing, filmmaking—it's all rhetorical work that self-organizes as an affectively intense performative venue for enhancing and reanimating our given rhetorical knowledge and skill and moving us toward ever more dynamic relations with that range of desirable work, with this desiring state of being, a state marked by identifications across a range of "fantasies of the good life" such that any talk of "organizing" seems futile in light of self-organization's inarticulable vortices of attempting, performing, revising, reflecting, bitching, hating, fearing, reveling, embracing, fucking it all and generally giving in to the dynamics of contemporary life. Berlant sees the value of this state of being, explaining that

> In all of these scenes of "the good life," the object that you thought would bring happiness becomes an object that deteriorates the conditions for happiness. But its presence represents the possibility of happiness as such. And so losing the bad object might be deemed worse than being destroyed by it. That's a relation of cruel optimism. (Published Interview, 2012)

So inasmuch as Fair Use, or DIY filmmaking may be the bad objects to which I've attached myself, what seems optimistically available for additional critique is the conventional path in academic life as yet another form of cruel optimism. I'm thinking about the path to tenure at a research-oriented institution, where you are recognized as "worthy," intellectually, productive, clever. Your workload is manageable, enviable, even. This scripted good life fantasy obtains within the academy and without, truth notwithstanding. In the 2015 Sundance Film Festival Grand Jury Prize and Audience Award winning film, *Me and Earl and the Dying Girl*, actor/comedian Nick Offerman plays the father of the film's protagonist. He wears a kimono and is mostly featured at home, eating various boutique items such as pig's feet and fried cuttlefish, and it's established that this grand eccentricity may be attributed to his "good life" as a tenured professor (of Sociology). However, fiction rarely radiates the fuller complexity. And most of us know that tenure rarely means kimonos

and unproblematic indulgence in foodporn. It seems to me that many of us who do favor working in jammies are doing so out of need and desire, flirting with new forms of the good-life in our present state of crisis over just what the good life "bracket" [may] mean, not because we are so lovingly supported and nurtured by our institutions.

I'm hitting play on a short film I made (in jammies), inspired by the Chicago based performance collective, "Manual Cinema." [If you have the desire, please prepare to hit "play" to accompany your reading. Play at "public presentation" speed. Start the film just as you finish reading this paragraph]. Their performance of *Mementos Mori* live-produced a 90-minute film noir experience, all enacted through shadow puppetry and the brilliant use of overheads, live actors and their silhouettes projected onto side screens that were then captured and projected onto a center screen. [hit play[52]].

I recall learning about the cuttlefish. Discovery Channel. I thought I'd been THE ONLY PERSON WATCHING, the identification so strong that I myself had discovered the cuttlefish's remarkable adaptation techniques, its trippy visuals, and how it could live successfully in a variety of scenes, so long as it psychotriggered its visual display systems to physiologically alter its appearance. I saw the special while I was in the process of generating my (2009) short film, *i'm like . . . professional*. With that film, I literally "followed in the wake of" DIY filmmakers M dot Strange, Andy Blubaugh, and Jonathan Cauoette, and its premiere screening was all vibratory pleasure. But prior to audience response are the rhetorical entanglements. Against identifiable notions of constructivism, obviously linking my work to the works of others in my field (publishing others, powerful others), I work(ed) alone. I used M's YouTube videos and audio tracks from published and at least one unpublished track by Beck, a file gifted to me by a former student who had been friends with the artist. Here, now, you hear a track from the brilliant Brian Eno. It is used in *Me and Earl and the Dying Girl* as the score to a film the lead character has made. An emotive, lovingly quirky avant-garde film he'd made for his girl. We finally get to see the film when he shows it to her in the hospital as they lie together in her standard unit hospital bed. It's all very constrained and institutionally valid, she is medicated and calm, he is there during visiting hours.

I was a DIY filmmaker as scholars were beginning to say "multimodality." Making films overshadowed The Book. Berlant:

> This is not a time for assurance but for experiment—to have
> patience with failure, with trying things out, to try new forms
> of life that also might not work—which doesn't make them

---

52   Visit https://vimeo.com/285638299. Password = shadows

> worse than what's there now. It is a time for using the impasse that we're in to learn something about how to imagine better economies of intimacy and labor. (Published Interview, 2012)

In light of academic economies that want ever more in exchange for "the good life," Berlant imagines various "good lifes," as cruel optimism "tracks the rise of a precarious public sphere":

> the world as in an impasse and . . . situation[s] beyond the normative good life structures, where people have a hard time imagining a genre that makes sense of life while they're in the middle of it. I'm saying that intense personal emotions about the shape and fraying of life are also collective, and have to do with an economic crisis meeting up with a crisis in the reproduction of fantasy. (Published Interview, 2012)

I wonder about fantasies—the conventional good life associated with traditional publications and academic labor. I worry that my own desires to work within vital emerging hybrid ecologies may represent a cruelly optimistic version of the good life that will leave me fewer and fewer options for engaging what I have come to embrace as creative and critical practice. More than ALL THAT WORRY, I want to be optimistic from within these benevolent, productive, and sometimes lonely fantasies. It's only ~~fear~~ fair.